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ABSTRACT

Objectivity, truth, freedom, and social responsibility--key principles in contemporary media ethics--fail to provide a practical, coherent code for responsible journalism. During the initial television coverage of Watergate on June 19, 1972, for example, the three television networks all observed these standards in their reporting, yet presented very different interpretations of Watergate, political leaders, the political process, and--implicitly--the appropriate responses of viewers to the incident. In addition, they failed to raise questions about the significant issues at stake and presented inadequate terms for understanding Watergate. A fifth and paramount tenet--cooperative interchange--is needed to effectively implement the other principles. Based on John Dewey's theory of mass communication, cooperative interchange assumes that objectivity, truth, freedom, and social responsibility are ethical only to the extent that they enhance community empathy and foresight. Applied to Watergate, this principle would have ensured that news coverage concentrated less on personalities and more on the larger impact on the national community's values and choices. (MM)

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LIMITATIONS IN THE TRADITIONAL CODE OF JOURNALISTIC RESPONSIBILITY

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, journalism professionals have acknowledged objectivity, truth, freedom, and social responsibility as key principles in any media ethics. While the four principles can offer the basis for a systematic, ethical theory of news in the Aristotelian tradition, this essay argues that their application to actual news coverage does not result in a practical, coherent code for responsible journalism.

To demonstrate its position, the essay explores how the four principles actually operated during the initial TV newscast coverage of Watergate on 19 June 1972. Although all three networks observed standards of objectivity, truth, freedom, and social responsibility in their reports, the incorporation of these principles did not lead to distinguished treatment of the event, failed to raise ultimately important issues at stake in the scandal, and set inadequate terms to understanding Watergate. These inappropriate terms then dominated newscast coverage for the rest of 1972.

A fifth principle of cooperative interchange is proposed to establish a workable code of journalism ethics. Grounded in Dewey's appeal for an "organized, articulate public," the fifth principle helps mediate among the other four and elicits a definition of news that goes beyond the mere transmission of data. To demonstrate its operation, the essay applies the cooperative interchange principle to the 19 June 1972 network coverage of Watergate.

Presented to the Qualitative Studies Division, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Annual Convention in Corvallis, Oregon, August 1983.

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Introduction

When Christians (12, pp. 22-24) reviewed the state of media ethics in 1977, he concluded that scholars currently operate in an environment which lacks solid theoretical foundations and developed ethical standards. His 1980 joint examination with Covert (14) into the teaching of journalistic ethics did not even attempt a systematic definition of the ethical principles at the core of media education. As Ferré (32, p. 45) noted the same year, most current evaluations of news end up destructive because:

> They describe moral ambiguities that involve journalists but provide little constructive theory for concerned journalists to use to discern the moral among the vile. . . . The mass media still need an ethic from which principles can be drawn to be applied to most every situation that journalists encounter.

These conditions leave professionals "unsure how to proceed" at a time when "ethical matters have never been more paramount for communicators" (15, p. 38).

The state of media ethics may sound bad, but it isn't hopeless. Ferré (32, p. 48) prescribed the development of "rationally justifiable theories that painstakingly define the good and encompass the multifarious moral issues within journalism." Christians (13) recommended a more systematic theory that: is based on the great philosophical and theological traditions, views humans in symbolic and creative terms, restores discussions of "absolute oughts," attends to systems grounded in covenant fraternity or spiritual community, and develops value-centered theories of communication. While these proposals may bear long-term fruit, they leave in a vacuum the ethical resolution of current media practices and principles.

This essay approaches the problem of a systematic media ethics from a more immediate and practical perspective. It argues that major principles for responsible communication already exist and can be organized into a comprehensive ethical theory. The essay then explores how well the principles worked during the initial Watergate reporting by the TV networks on 19 June 1972. Based on its evaluation of existing

principles in operation, the study proposes a new direction for ethical scholarship.

Principles of News Responsibility

During the last three decades, journalism professionals have acknowledged objectivity, truth, freedom, and social responsibility as key principles in any media ethics (7, 17, 46). Manifestations of each principle have been present in the western media for a century or longer (54; 58, pp. 143-156). Yet agreement and consistency about what each principle means has never been satisfactorily established. In its 1975 "Statement of Principles," for example, the American Society of Newspaper Editors (52, pp. 56-58) identified six standards: responsibility, freedom of the press, independence, truth and accuracy, impartiality, fair play. Besides the redundancy inherent in terms like "freedom" and "independence," repetitiveness abounds in the description of each principle. Under the standard of "responsibility," this code also discusses freedom. Under "truth and accuracy," there are references to fairness and to freedom from bias (impartiality?). Under "fair play," the principle of accuracy is evoked. Such vague delineations contribute to the ethical uncertainties described by Ferré (32) and Christians (12, 13). Clearer distinctions among the principles could alleviate some of the problems confronting ethical scholarship.

Working journalists see objectivity as "the use of certain procedures discernible to the news consumer" to gather and structure "'facts' in a detached, unbiased, impersonal manner" (62). According to this principle, journalists should function as clear pipes that facilitate efficient flow of observable data rather than engage in qualitative evaluation of the data they deliver (57, p. 54). Professionals must neutralize their own "wants, tastes, and moral or religious beliefs" to provide information "based on first-hand comparison of reports by credible witnesses," commonly called "sources" (36, pp. 153-155; 50, pp. 150-156; 58, pp. 177-198). The inverted pyramid style of print journalism; the use of on-the-scene film and straight-faced, conservatively dressed correspondents; the segregation of

commentary and editorials from the rest of the news exemplify some of the procedures. The practice of objectivity, in other words, requires the implementation of various reporting techniques to enhance impartiality (44).

The principle of truth mandates the faithful representation of facts in context. As the American Society of News Editors declares: ". . . every effort must be made to assure that the news content is accurate . . . and in context" (52, p. 57). According to the Commission on Freedom of the Press: "Today our society needs, first, a truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning" (17, p. 20).

The ideal of journalistic freedom insists on the unfettered right to investigate and report as journalists see fit: "It carries with it the freedom and the responsibility to discuss, question, and challenge actions and utterances of our government and of our public and private institutions" (52, p. 58). Consequently, the news media can operate as a "fourth branch of government" that checks on the other three branches and influences the course of policy (11, pp. 13-21). For Walter Cronkite, freedom outshines all other ethical standards: "If you're going to accept journalists only if they conform to some established norm, you won't have the new blood and vital free flow of new ideas that are absolutely essential to a vital press" (48, p. 72).

The obligation of social responsibility is the most recent, but least clearly delineated, addition to journalistic codes. Hulteng (40, p. 23) describes the principle this way: "Journalists must observe a responsibility to the public welfare; their impressive power should be employed for the general good, not for private advantage" (Italics added). According to the Commission on Freedom of the Press (17, pp. 20-21; 55, pp. 73-103), social responsibility requires journalists to: provide a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism; project the positions of all groups in society to one another; clarify community goals and values; and reach every member of society. Anderson's survey (1, 60) revealed that working journalists include under this norm: high professional standards and training, opportunities for internal

criticism and regulation, and machinery for external reviews to insure an informed citizenship.

When defined as they have been above, the four principles of objectivity, truth, freedom, and social responsibility offer the basis for a systematic, ethical theory of news gathering and presentation in the tradition of Aristotelian thought (45, pp. xviii-xxxiv). The four principles exemplify patterns of responsibility for each of Aristotle's four causes of action. Objectivity deals with the formal techniques of news production. Truth prescribes the relationship between the journalistic story and the material from real life which it claims to 're-present.' Freedom establishes the essential characteristic of all reporters, who serve as efficient causes of news. And social responsibility articulates a vision of the final goal of the enterprise: a well-informed public. In the terminology of Burke (8, pp. x-xvi), objectivity refers to criteria for proper use of agency. Truth specifies responsibility to scene. Freedom characterizes the best kind of agent. Social responsibility sets the terms for the desirable purpose of news.

Although the work is yet to be done, it also seems theoretically possible to develop similar Aristotelian norms for other media communications besides news. The problem of violence on television, for example, is often researched and debated in social responsibility terms (final cause). Questions of program censorship by government or advertisers fall into the freedom category (efficient cause). Issues of invasion of privacy and pornography entail a tension between the social responsibility and freedom principles (final and efficient causes). Insertion of a blackout frame between a segment of a children's program and its commercial acknowledges the need for formal techniques to insure objectivity (formal cause). Debates about the number and roles of women or minorities in media entertainment incorporate arguments based on the standard of truth (material cause).

If one wishes to establish a theory of media ethics grounded in community traditions, then these four principles appear well suited to harness fundamental beliefs

and practices of American life. The journalist's search for unimpeachable reality parallels the restless quest by the early religious settlers for the true Kingdom of God on earth. The impetus for revolution and constitution emerged from the Enlightment belief that free persons can govern themselves. The emergence of the nation as a leader in world affairs and in technological development paralleled the adoption of an open-minded, objective approach to experience. Finally the call for social responsibility recognizes Hobbesian realpolitik, the view that only authoritatively imposed and monitored standards can control news reporting dominated by self interest. According to Bellah (4), these visions of social reality undergird the American experience. They also have operated in the evolution of news in American society (54).

From the perspective of an ethical theory in the American tradition, it would seem as if the principles of objectivity, truth, freedom, and social responsibility already provide the seeds for a systematic media ethics. Ferré and Christians notwithstanding, many recent writings in journalistic ethics have assumed the soundness of the principles and concentrated on how these standards get incorporated into the daily routine of newsworkers. Such discussions of media morality usually focus on gathering and production issues: reportorial conflicts of interest, relationships with sources, on-and-off-the record interviews, freebies, checkbook journalism, and privacy rights (10, 40, 46, 52, 59). When critics find journalistic practices wanting, they often question the professionalism of the reporters (16, 27, 43) or the nature of the social system (26, 30, 31, 38, 53, 61) in which media work occurs, rather than the systematic integrity and applicability of the principles.

But current ethical discussions do not seem to consider whether the established principles of responsibility actually work. Even if the principles manifest theoretical soundness and enjoy faithful observance by news professionals, their employment may not result in a desirable news product. Although intellectual coherence and conscientious adherence are both required for the pursuit of the good, ethical

principles must also be tested by practical application. The next section of this essay explores whether employment of established principles in one news story covered by all three networks resulted in satisfactory messages. This practical examination of how ethical principles actually operated in a single report during the first weekday coverage of the Watergate break-in on 19 June 1972 represents a preliminary incursion into an unexplored area of media morality. At the very least, it should help clarify what the standards of objectivity, truth, freedom and social responsibility came to during inaugural newscast coverage of the nation's major political scandal of the century.

The Operation of Ethical Principles in a Network Report

On 17 June 1972, five men were caught breaking into Democratic National Committee headquarters in Washington, D.C. The resulting Watergate affair scandalized the nation, destroyed the efficacy of the Nixon administration, and led to the first resignation and pardoning of a President in American history. By raising fundamental questions about the nation's character, policies, and institutions, the Watergate experience drastically changes the way Americans viewed themselves. For most Americans, the news media charted 'Watergate' from an apparently spontaneous, idiosyncratic event to an all consuming, national crisis. Yet both Barrett (2, p. 74; 3, pp. 2-4) and Diamond (25, pp. 205-220) have argued that network journalism failed in 1972 to provide citizens with the information they needed to make informed judgments early about Watergate. A closer look at the 19 June 1972 coverage should disclose whether the newscasts observed the four ethical principles and how their performance that day contributed to public understanding of the scandal.[1] Table I outlines the structure of the coverage in this first weeknight report about Watergate.

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[1]This analysis is based on a series of viewings of the three reports through the rental program of the Television News Archive, Vanderbilt University.

ABC: 240 Seconds

1. Intro: 5 nabbed seemingly preparing to tap or bug. (9")

2. Video walkthrough of break-in with narrative. (52")

3. Info about suspects. (59")

4. Reaction of Democratic spokesman to campaign caper with emphasis on irony and joy about Republicans seemingly with their hands in the cookie jar. (91")

5. Reactions of Republicans: denial of any connection. (14")

6. Reaction of Presidential spokesmen: no involvement in this third-rate burglary attempt. (15")

CBS: 300 Seconds

1. Intro: Illegal bugging was apparently aim; political backgrounds of men kick up a storm. (15")

2. Video walkthrough of break-in with narrative. (44")

3. Info about suspect connected with Presidential reelection efforts. (18")

4. Reaction of Democratic spokesman: How many more are there? (40")

5. Reaction of Republican spokesman: despicable, incomprehensible, fruitless, irrational act. (32")

6. Reaction of Democratic candidates against Nixon administration: incredible act of political surveillance that poisons political process; danger to privacy of all citizens; too free a use of wiretaps by this administration leading to a quasi-fascism. (118")

7. Info about suspects. (33")

NBC: 145 Seconds

1. Intro: Fascinating and exotic story about men trying to install eavesdropping equipment. Connection with Presidential reelection efforts. Republicans scandalized and fit to be tied. (30")

2. Reactions of Democrats: will try to tighten security. (12")

3. Video walkthrough of break-in with narrative. (22")

4. Info about suspect connected with Presidential reelection efforts. (12")

5. Reaction of Republican spokesman: surprised and dismayed about a deplorable act that should be fully investigated. (31")

6. Reaction of Democrats: file a lawsuit. (13")

7. Reaction of Presidential spokesman: no comment on a third-rate burglary attempt nor condonement of second-rate activity. (13")

8. Reaction of Democratic spokesman: irony and legal action. (12")

Analysis of each network's version of the 19 June 1972 story reveals that all three incorporated objectivity, truth, freedom, and social responsibility into their coverage. To insure objectivity, for example, all provided information "based on first-hand comparison of reports of credible witnesses" (36, p. 153). On this day, sources included: law officers investigating the break-in, Democratic political leaders and Presidential hopefuls, Republican political leaders and Presidential spokesmen. To insure further impartiality, the reports offered videotape from the crime scene and videotaped or verbatim quotes from the sources. Correspondents employed qualifiers such as "seemingly" and "apparently" to avoid making personal judgments about the actions of the intruders.

Under the standard of objectivity, journalists work hard to cultivate reliable sources. Because they require continued access to the media and wish to maintain the trust of their constituencies, known public officials and party spokespersons qualify as reliable, even though they often project single institutional points of view. In the case of a break-in at national political headquarters, the reactions of these individuals contain additional degrees of subjectivity and institutional self interest. Since objectivity prescribes that journalists base their entire story on sources and since these self-interested representatives of partisan politics were the only ones speaking with track records of reliability, newscasters were forced to use them. Since objectivity forbids overt commentary or editorializing about source comments in news stories, the newscasts employed indirect techniques to interpret Watergate's meaning. On this particular reporting day, each network selected different sources, different reactions to Watergate from the same sources, and different narrative organizations of source comments. Thus the presentational form of the report displays objectivity, while the validity of the report depends on source reliability and sound production judgments.

In the interest of truth, all networks accurately portrayed specific details of empirically observable events. They only presented information verified firsthand

by two or more sources. Yet, each network chose different accuracies to report, devoted different amounts of attention to the facts, and structured their presentations in different ways. One need only compare ABC's ninety seconds on Democratic spokesman O'Brien "waxing righteously indignant" about the "campaign caper" during "standard political oratory" with forty seconds of less ironic and playful coverage about the same spokesman from CBS. Meanwhile, CBS exclusively featured 118 seconds of charges raised by Democratic presidential candidates about the political seriousness of the affair and the culpability of the Nixon administration. NBC made only passing reference to O'Brien's reaction, but chose one of his more ironic and pointed observations as a quote. This network devoted proportionately more attention to Republican dismay and condemnation of the incident.

Nothing presented by any network could be described as false. Yet each network's selection and structure of "facts" and "truths" implied different interpretations about Watergate, political leaders, the political process, and, implicitly at least, the appropriate response of viewers to the incident. Since all three accurately represented events of the day, should viewers have laughed at the partisan embarrassment portrayed by ABC? Should they have been alarmed by Democratic charges of invasion of privacy and quasi-fascism chronicled in CBS? Or should they have been relieved by the dismayed Republicans who, according to NBC, sought a full investigation of the facts? The different, yet honest, selections and organizations of accurate facts seems to bias the meanings that viewers can attribute to the story.

Time and again in early Watergate reports, networks provided contrasting versions of partisan reactions to Watergate. Which of the three versions outlined above was <u>really</u> the correct one? At the time, how could news professionals have effectively determined this? Was it appropriate to set Watergate in ABC's context of partisanship? Did this sort of coverage prepare or distract viewers from the notion that Watergate transcended partisanship and threatened the roots of the national order?

Even if the 'true' version of Watergate had been available in 1972, any efforts to

eliminate reporting slants or require strict adherence to a single version of the facts would fly directly in the face of the freedom principle. As it is legally interpreted today, press freedom protects even false reports about matters of public importance as long as journalists followed normal reporting practices and did not maliciously present the false information (47, pp. 99-138). Besides offering different slants, the networks also exercised their freedom by continuing to cover Watergate despite threats, pressure, and vindictive reprisals against those publicizing Watergate revelations (6, pp. 105, 220-221; 19, pp. 172-175).

The journalistic freedom to transmit anything or everything about Watergate raises real questions about the usefulness and relevance of what the networks did present in their necessarily compact coverage. Although visually interesting, for example, how relevant were the video walkthroughs of stairways and offices provided by all three networks? When NBC anchorperson Chancellor introduced the "exotic" Watergate story as the "talk of the Capital today" and classified a subsequent twenty-second report about delegate selection rules as more important, he exercised freedom. But were his disarming, freely offered observations relevant? Did they provide a useful lens through which the viewer could interpret the NBC report on Robert Dole, Republican spokesman who was "surprised and dismayed" by a break-in that he could only "deplore," and to which he could not find words to respond. Chancellor's terms alerted the viewer to the novelty of Watergate even as they freely ignored traditional contexts of interpretation. In a society continuously bombarded by data, how relevant are presentations of diverse novel fragments which, according to Ellul (28, pp. 53-67; 29, pp. 202-257), narcotize or confuse viewers rather than inform them.

Ellul's spectre of a passive audience held captive by a few centralized news outlets has turned attention to standards for social responsibility. Journalists view this principle as calling for professionally established checks on their conduct in order to meet the information needs of citizens (41, pp. 113-132). Codes of network news practices, minimal professional training requirements, affirmative

action employment policies, ombudsmen, journalism reviews, and the national press council help establish general guidelines for the principle. Each network organization affirms at least some of these strategies.

Perhaps the most clearly developed standard of social responsibility in broadcast news is the fairness doctrine. The Federal Communications Commission established the fairness obligation to prevent "powerful broadcasters from using a scarce resource --the airwaves--to control the data received by the public" and to provide "general access for airing the views of various groups and individuals" (56, p. 11). As "the single most important requirement of operation in the public interest" (18), this maxim contains two major provisions: "The first . . . demands that broadcast licensees devote a reasonable amount of their programming to controversial issues of public importance. The second . . . requires that when such issues are presented, contrasting views on them be aired" (56, p. 9).

During their 1972 Watergate coverage, the networks went out of their way to treat the break-in as a controversial issue and to obtain reactions from all interested groups and individuals. On the 19 June reports, for example, a total of twelve viewpoints were named: six on ABC (The Republican National Committee, the Committee to Reelect the President, Republican National Chairman Dole, Democratic National Chairman O'Brien, Nixon campaign manager Mitchell, and Presidential secretary Ziegler); eight on CBS (Dole, O'Brien, Democratic Presidential candidates Humphrey, Muskie, and McGovern, Democratic party officials, defense lawyers for the alleged burglars, and bail bondsmen); and six on NBC (the Republican National Committee, the Committee to Reelect, Dole, O'Brien, Ziegler, and Democratic officials). The relative time devoted to each viewpoint differed for each network on this particular date: ABC and CBS paid more attention to Democrats, NBC paid more attention to Republicans. On balance during all of 1972, however, each network provided sufficient time for all major partisan viewpoints.

In the case of Watergate, conscientious observance of fairness did not lead to

distinguished coverage. When 'reliable' Democratic sources commented, they usually offered negative viewpoints about their partisan and campaign rivals. Republican spokespersons denied involvement and returned the favor. Meanwhile, official investigators revealed very little to insure that the burglars would get a fair trial in early 1973. Consequently in 1972, the networks framed Watergate as a series of partisan accusations, denials, and counter accusations. Their adherence to objectivity and social responsibility produced little light but lots of partisan heat about the whole affair.

Early Watergate coverage discloses other shortcomings of the fairness standard. The general public knew little and cared less about the break-in during 1972, since many other important issues faced America. Perhaps the standard of social responsibility thus required networks to focus less on partisan reactions to Watergate and more on the Indochina war, racism, urban problems, poverty, etc. (34, p. 99). Is it more "socially responsible" to devote a precious twenty two and a half minutes to issues with clear regional, minority, or advocacy impact than to another rhubarb in Washington, D.C.?

Network observance of fairness can also lead to irresponsible manipulation by news sources. For example, adhering to a strategy of "no comment" to Watergate developments, the White House placed the networks in the awkward position of receiving more anti-administration viewpoints than pro-administration statements. The potential threat of grievances under the fairness doctrine forced newscasters who lacked White House statements to downplay opposition comments and to make controversy about the issue seem evenly balanced when it actually wasn't. Viewers can come away from such coverage with wrong impressions about the issue's importance, about the degree of concern on a particular side of the issue, and about the response they ought to muster (51).

Finally, some critics argue that the principle of social responsibility only presumes the social health and vitality of the American social order as long as its

current institutions enjoy media access and political representation proportionate to their power. These critics question the viability and worth of current institutional arrangements which seem to support the status quo of entrenched power rather than facilitate the needed reforms. They would classify network delineations of Watergate in partisan terms as an instance of the "hegemony" they criticize (38, pp. 1-18). In their view, the scandal exposed the infiltration of private, capitalistic techniques and values into an American system which requires radical reorganization to regain its health. Thus journalists who adhere to the principle of social responsibility may help to cover up the 'real' problems of America, rather than make them issues of public discussion. By observing fairness in their presentation of partisan conflicts over Watergate, the newscasts inadvertently reinforced the status of political parties and denigrated the importance of other issues and social change.

The preceeding review of ethical principles in the 19 June 1972 report typifies the kind of responsible journalism offered by the networks during early coverage of Watergate. It appears that newscasters conscientiously followed the four major principles. Nonetheless, their observance of these standards did not raise ultimately important issues involved in the scandal. Whatever else it entailed, Watergate was not the story of usual party bickering which the networks reported. Thus, early network coverage obfuscated other issues involved in the scandal.[2] The above analysis shows that objective presentation of sources raises, but does not necessarily resolve the issues of information reliability, source detachment, and editorial interpretation. It found that adherence to the principle of truth does not overcome bias. The exercise of journalistic freedom may exacerbate the dilemma of relevance in today's information overload society, while social responsibility seems vulnerable to manipulation and

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[2]Debate about Watergate in 1973 and 1974 revolved around the issues of balance of power in government, the arrogant attitude toward the Presidency held by the Nixon White House, a new morality (or lack thereof) in politics, and the eclipse of the public.

hegemony. Moreover, the faithful pursuit of one principle leads to conflicts and contradictions with other principles.

In the case of early Watergate events, therefore, conscientious reports based on theoretically sound and systematic principles of journalistic ethics did not ensure appropriate coverage. In fact, network observance of objectivity, truth, freedom, and social responsibility may have helped mislead Americans into believing during 1972 and early 1973 that Watergate did not entail serious matters of corruption or dishonesty in the White House, but represented instead "just politics--the kind of thing that both parties engage in" (35, pp. 114-115; 42). On 7 November 1972, the same populace provided Richard Nixon with the largest numerical margin of voters and numbers of states ever carried by a Presidential candidate (63, pp. 297 & 342). In late January of 1973, the Gallup poll recorded a 68% approval rate "of the way Richard Nixon is handling his job as president." This represented the highest rating for his entire period in office, seven percentage points higher than public satisfaction had been just before the burglars were caught on 17 June 1972 (35, pp. 37 & 95; 42).

Development of a New Ethical Principle for News

The preceeding discussion raises important issues about the state of the recognized ethical principles for media responsibility. From a theoretical perspective, existent principles of objectivity, truth, freedom, and social responsibility can be defined and developed into a coherent ethical system with roots in the American tradition and classical philosphical thought. These same principles can be discerned operating in recent news communications. But from the practical perspective of early Watergate coverage, it appears that observance of the principles didn't ensure satisfactory communications.

If subsequent research verifies that adherence to the established principles of responsible media does not always facilitate satisfactory communication, then new principles and new understandings of the communications media should be considered.

According to Carey (9, p. 3), a "transmission" understanding of communication has dominated American research (including, presumably, ethical research). This approach defines communication as "a process whereby messages are transmitted in space for the control of distance and people." It stresses the transfer of data among rational beings who then directly or deliberatively put those bits of information or entertainment to some use. In such a schema, ethical principles encouraging objective, free-flowing, accurate, and socially accountable data would seem particularly attractive.

Deriving this thought from John Dewey (20, 21, 22, 23, 24), Carey argues that communication also operates in a way which has been overlooked by American media scholars. This "ritual" approach views communication as a process of "sharing, participation, association, fellowship, and the possession of a common faith" (9, p. 7). Instead of simply transferring intelligible data, communication also takes the form of drama: ". . . it does not describe the world but portrays an arena of dramatic forces and action . . . and it invites our participation on the basis of our assuming, often vicariously, social roles within it" (9, p. 9). It doesn't merely provide discrete, directly useable information, but also indirectly functions "to construct, maintain, repair, and transform reality." Like Gregg or Gerbner and Gross (39, p. 222; 37, p. 175), the ritual approach is most concerned about the profound impact of communications on "basic assumptions" about life and on the "common consciousness rather than the effect on short-run attitude or behavior change."

From Dewey's perspective (20, p. 52), an ethical system built around the ritual understanding of communication might ground its principles on the <u>active</u> relation between the projection of human imagination and the conditions of experience. Drawing its resources from the "actual connections of human beings one with another" (20, p. 80), this ethical system makes "shared experience" the greatest of human goods (49). In this approach all responsible communication would seek to enhance "learning from joint experience with others how to enrich one's own understanding of things and to increase one's insight into the values to be found in living together in the human scene" (49,

p. 109). For Belman (5), Dewey's approach mandates communication characterized by cooperation, foresight, and empathy, qualities not included in the traditional four principles of news:

> Something is literally made common in at least two centres of behavior. To understand is to anticipate together [foresight], it is to make cross-reference which, when acted upon, brings about a partaking in a common inclusive undertaking [cooperation]. . . . It is communication, the establishment of cooperation in an activity in which there are partners, and in which the activity of each is modified and regulated by the partnership [empathy] (23, p. 179).

The communications emerging from this principle of cooperative interchange must be critically analyzed to determine whether they contribute to "the significant achievement of men in science and art and all the kindly offices of intercourse and communication" whether they nurture and expand "the values of natural human intercourse and mutual dependence" (20, pp. 72-73, 85-87).

Journalistically speaking, then, whenever news workers, news makers, and members of the news audience engage in the news habit, they carry out some degree of cooperative interchange about their new experiences of the current environment. In the process they share with empathy and foresight what these experiences may mean for their past, present, and future. Such communicative activity invariably reformulates the requirements for good living, for a good society, and for good journalism. Longstanding ethical principles of responsible journalism can and do undergo change in the experience. Consider the 1972 airing of charges about bugging or dirty tricks, countercharges about irresponsible reporting and partisanship, and "no comments" about third-rate burglary attempts. Regular broadcast of such events (experience) and interpretations (emphatic foresight) eventually generates questions about the worth of American politics and the worth of the news enterprise that reports incessant partisanship as though it was an important event to share. This sort of early Watergate reporting demoralizes and paralyzes participants in the news habit.

Although the principle of cooperative interchange idealized the face-to-face group relationships of nineteenth century agrarian America, Dewey considered this

ideal too precious a heritage to let slip away. In The Public and Its Problems, Dewey applies cooperative interchange to the news habit. Despite great strides in "the physical and external means of collecting information," news for Dewey failed to provide society's members with the wherewithal to become an "organized, articulate public" (24, pp. 179-184). Instead of displaying or enhancing empathy and foresight, mass media news "limits the contacts, the exchanges, the communications, the interactions by which experience is steadied while it is also enlarged and enriched" (21, p. 228).

When applied to responsible news, Dewey's theory would mandate that the principles of objectivity, truth, freedom, and social responsibility be judged ethical only to the extent that they facilitate "learning from joint experience with others how to enrich one's own understanding of things and to increase one's insight into the values to be found in living together in the human scene . . ." (21, pp. 225-226). Both source reporting (objectivity) and accurate re-presentation of the actual environment (truth) are commendable to the degree that they provide joint experiences that are mutually enhancing. Freedom and social responsibility should be affirmed to the extent that they enrich and increase the values worth experiencing individually and sharing collectively.

In addition to serving as a calculus for the implementation of the other principles of responsible journalism, cooperative interchange could be constructively incorporated into the news habit as a fifth and paramount principle. Dewey (24, pp. 185-210; 23, pp. 138-170), for example, sought improvements in news that would enhance "the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion" (24, p. 208). If these suggestions do not seem workable to some professionals in broadcasting, then they had better tune in more often. In the 1970's and 1980's, programs that incorporated Dewey's principle of interchange included: public radio's "All Things Considered;" public television's "MacNeil/Lehrer Report" and "The Week in Review;" and commercial television's "Today," "the Phil Donahue Show," and "Sixty Minutes." Special news coverage

of national political conventions and space voyages, as well as the rise of "talk radio," served as still other examples.

Application

When this essay reviewed the current principles of responsible journalism, it found them to be high minded and affirmative of the American tradition. But when it examined whether objectivity, truth, freedom, and social responsibility worked during early coverage of Watergate, it found them inadequate. Although newscasters followed these standards, the 1972 reports for the most part neither alerted citizens to the scandal that would dominate 1973 and 1974 headlines nor interpreted Watergate in a sustainable manner. Instead of helping to clarify social issues, news coverage seemed to become a social issue in its own right. The responsibilities connected with the news habit require further theoretical and practical analysis than they have been given so far.

For Dewey, mass media news constitutes the social issue when its coverage stifles the emergence and celebration of an articulate public. His notion of cooperative interchange provides a way to evaluate the other standards of journalistic responsibility. It may also serve as a paramount ethical principle for the news habit. But how would it have worked in the instance of early Watergate news?

If they had applied Dewey's approach to early Watergate news, network journalists would have relied less on partisan sources eager to use each revelation as a publicity device. On 19 June 1972, for example, ABC's ninety-second report about the anti-Republican quips delivered by Democratic Chairman O'Brien strains objectivity at the expense of cooperative interchange. ABC described O'Brien's speech as "standard political oratory." Yet it devoted five percent of its newscast to the seasoned orator's ironic barbs deliberately served up for media attention. CBS and NBC, on the other hand, presented just O'Brien's main charges about the administration's

violation of its law and order policy. But all three networks often treated Watergate in terms of the personalities of sources readily available to correspondents and most likely to offer provocative, "made-for-television" responses. The qualitative impact their ideas have on deliberations about values and choices for public life should be given greater weight.

When they presented Watergate in terms of the election campaign, newscasts certainly didn't violate accuracy. But they did ignore the larger context of Watergate's importance for American life. Given the constraints which govern story selection, newscasters incorporate the factor of long-term importance among their reasons for airing a particular story. Dewey's notion of cooperative interchange recommends that those judgments about larger importance be shared with empathy and foresight. The 19 June charges on CBS of candidates Humphrey, Muskie, and McGovern provide one way to raise the possibility of long-term issues involved in Watergate. To be sure, these charges were issued by presidential hopefuls in the heat of a partisan campaign. But in another sense, they pointed to the important issues of a poisoned political process, loss of privacy, and executive privilege vs. authoritarian fiat--all of which would be debated for some months to come in the courts, in Congress, and among citizens. Journalists should explicitly offer connections between the immediate event and the longer history of the nation. Then deliberation about the truth and worth of each interpretation can begin.

Given its own spirit of open deliberation and experience sharing, the principle of cooperative interchange should not be used to curtail newscaster freedom. But journalists must weigh their exercise of that freedom against the report's relevance for citizen debate about the major values and choices facing the national community. The video re-enactment of the burglary crime by all three networks or NBC's stress on the exotic aspects of Watergate can overstep freedom when they encourage the audience to respond as spectators rather than as active participants in news making.

In a similar fashion, the obligation to fairness should not be used to block

the possibility of community responses to events. The 19 June NBC report, for example, included four segments of less than fifteen seconds each about various partisan reactions to Watergate along with a fifth, thirty-second reaction. No single issue of contention emerged from the reactions. Although this sort of staccato sequencing insured the inclusion of most major "sides," it did not permit full exposition of any viewpoint nor encourage thoughtful audience response to it. Legally speaking, the fairness doctrine does not require the inclusion of every side nor a perfect balancing of sides in each newscast. When broadcaster convenience or source satisfaction becomes more important than viewer understanding of and engagement with any single view, then newscasters have subverted the notion of cooperative interchange.

Full incorporation of cooperative interchange as an additional principle of responsible news would ultimately require new forms of journalistic presentation in addition to these instances of modification. Changes would also have to take place in the way news makers and audiences approach the news habit. At the core of these changes would be the realization that news consists not only of factual data but also entails communal celebration. Under the new principle, responsible journalism would seek to replace an authoritative, uncompromising attitude of "That's the way it is" with a more curious, experimental, open-ended model. News would acknowledge and invite participation in what it's been for some time: the expression of empathic and insightful judgments about what's important for the contemporary community and about why citizens should become publicly involved in deliberations about the community's future.

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